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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000107

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS  
NSC FOR DORMANDY

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: DESPITE DISASTER, PARLIAMENTARY  
ELECTIONS ON FOR JANUARY 22

REF: A. COLOMBO 93

[1](#)B. 04 COLOMBO 2044

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Parliamentary elections, postponed from December 31 after the tsunami that hit Maldives December 26, have been rescheduled for January 22. The government's desire to go ahead is understandable in order to avoid charges that it is using the tsunami to put off an election it does not want. Inevitably, however, it will now be accused of trying to rush through an election while Maldivians remain focused on tsunami recovery. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) DISMISSAL OF CHARGES: On December 31, 2004, President Abdul Maumoon Gayoom "ordered the withdrawal of charges of high treason and charges of public disorder offences following the incident of August 12-13 this year," according to a statement on the President's official website. It went on to characterize the President's motivation for calling for the dismissal of charges as "to promote and sustain that (community) spirit" evident in the wake of the December 26 tsunami that struck the island nation (Ref A). In a January 1 conversation, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Chief Government Spokesman, told poloff that all charges, except for two, had been dismissed. No one remained under detention or was prohibited from traveling out of Maldives. Shaheed said the government was only pursuing two cases stemming from the August 12-13 civil unrest: one against the individual alleged to have stabbed a National Security Service (NSS) officer on August 13 and a second against an individual alleged to have been found with literature related to killing President Gayoom. Both of these men remain in jail pending their trials.

[1](#)3. (C) COMMITMENT TO ELECTIONS: Parliamentary elections, which had been scheduled for December 31, 2004, were obviously postponed in the aftermath of the tsunami. The Government of the Republic of Maldives (GORM) clearly felt that it would be impossible to organize such an undertaking when the country's attention and resources were solely focused on aiding citizens still reeling from the disaster. Shaheed shared such sentiments with poloff during the same January 1 conversation, noting that the elections had been tentatively scheduled for January 22. Explaining the reasoning behind choosing the date, he said the Constitution required the new Majlis (Parliament) to be selected at least one month prior to the end -- February 23, 2005 -- of the current Majlis' term.

[1](#)4. (C) In a follow-up January 12 conversation, Shaheed told poloff that, in his view, the GORM would try to honor the January 22 date for elections. He felt the government would lose credibility if the elections were further postponed. He also felt that, given the immense rehabilitation and reconstruction challenge facing the country, it would be preferable to work with a Majlis with a new mandate for decision-making.

[1](#)5. (C) Poloff spoke with Ibrahim Rashad, the Elections Commissioner on January 13, who confirmed that the government intended to hold elections on January 22, with hopes of declaring the results by January 26. He was not sure, however, how the government would manage the logistics given the realignment of transportation resources since the tsunami. He admitted that organizing voting stations to

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accommodate internally displaced persons (IDPs) would be a challenge but said, "the Constitution doesn't allow for another date." (Note: Candidates are elected on an atoll-wide basis. From poloff's impression during a January 2-4 visit to Maldives, it seemed that many IDPs were on islands within their home atoll, thus getting them the proper ballot may be one of the Election Commissioner's smaller challenges. End Note.) When asked about former detainees who may have wanted to run for a Majlis seat but were allegedly barred from submitting their paperwork, Rashad said that the candidate slate remained the same as the original

one intended for the December 31 vote. He said that no more people would be able to submit candidacy papers and noted that no one had tried to do so. Rashad stated that Commonwealth and South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) election observing teams would return for the January 22 vote (Ref B).

16. (C) COMMENT: Given the relief effort which the GORM faces, it seems that there is hardly time to run an election, let alone to consider whether the atmosphere for it is free or fair. To postpone the elections beyond the January 22 date, however, would invite further speculation about the validity of the election or charges that the government was using the tsunami to avoid a vote it does not want. The government recognizes what would result from a twice-delayed election and is eager to avoid such criticism. Despite the GORM's commitment to selecting the new Majlis, it still is not clear, however, just how the government will manage to actually pull off the logistical challenge of the election with so many resources otherwise engaged. END COMMENT.

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